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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISTANBUL 000452

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [KFRD](#) [ASEC](#) [PREF](#) [UK](#) [MD](#) [TK](#)

SUBJECT: "RUSSIAN" PROSTITUTION IN ISTANBUL

REF: ANKARA 1396

Classified By: Consul General David Arnett for reasons 1.5 (b) & (d)

11. (C) In separate March 26 meetings, Istanbul contacts confirmed that illegal foreign prostitution in Istanbul remains widespread, and that criminal networks, and possibly even corrupted officials, have a lucrative stake in the business. Marmara University sociologist professor Nilufer Narli told poloff that foreign prostitution, particularly involving "Russians," remains widespread in various neighborhoods of Istanbul (Note: Such women are generally Moldovan, but also come from the other countries in the region. End Note). In addition to cheap hotels and bars which play host to foreign prostitution in Taksim, Laleli, and Aksaray, Sisli District Governor Osman Demir confirmed that prostitution is also widespread in the night clubs of the Elmadag neighborhood in Sisli. Asked how many of these women might have been involuntarily forced into this work, both Narli and Demir said that the overwhelming majority work voluntarily. Demir maintained that many are primarily "suitcase traders," who simply "raise capital" by engaging in prostitution on the side. Narli said that her research had not found many such women, although she admitted that there are probably some young women who are lured to Istanbul under the expectation that they will engage in other work (as waitresses, maids, or babysitters), and are pressured into prostitution by economic circumstances or even by force.

12. (C) Both Demir and Narli said that criminal groups have a major stake in the prostitution business. Demir (who oversees the security apparatus for the Sisli district) told poloff that he believes both local and international groups are involved. In addition to the mafia elements, Narli added that there are "undoubtedly" corrupt officials who profit from these illegal activities. She pointed to the fact that some of the hotels and other establishments where such prostitution occurs are even owned by retired police officials. The fact that even the highest levels of Turkish society use such prostitutes (or at least the exclusive high-end "escorts"), Narli suggested, may be why such illegal activities are tolerated. Separately, Demir noted that the sharp disparity between the economic prospects such women face at home compared with what they can earn in Istanbul will always make it difficult for the authorities to control such activities.

13. (SBU) Comment: These remarks largely track with what we had understood to be the situation here in Istanbul. It is interesting that both of these contacts raised the subject on their own in meetings on other subjects, suggesting to us that our contacts are increasingly aware of our concerns regarding trafficking in persons.

ARNETT